DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 843 FL 020 626

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TITLE From Reanalysis to Convergence: Swahili-Amba.
PUB DATE Jun 92
NOTE 20p.; In: Harlow, S. J. and Warner, A. R., Eds. York Papers in Linguistics, 16; see FL 020 620.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Diachronic Linguistics; Foreign Countries; *Grammar; *Language Patterns; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; *Morphology (Languages); *Swahili; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS *Relative Clauses

ABSTRACT

The history of one morphological pattern in Swahili relative clause structure, in which the relative particle attaches to "-amba," is discussed. First, the patterns of this construction are analyzed and illustrated. The evolution of this formation from an archaic verb is then examined, noting the difficulties in tracing its history through a period of very limited written linguistic data. Patterns of "-amba" use are analyzed in three corpora of early (early 19th century) poetry and six varied modern (20th century) corpora of prose. The function of cultural and language contact in this evolution is assessed, with attention given to the influence of English in particular. A 26-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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From Reanalysis to Convergence: Swahili-Amba*

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FROM REANALYSIS TO CONVERGENCE: SWAHILI -AMBA*

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1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the historical development of one of the morphological patterns of Swahili relative clause structure and the later convergence of Swahili and English surface structure in relative clause sentences in a particular written genre. The discussion is broadly socio-historical in approach and deliberately refrains from characterising the morphosyntax within a particular syntactic model or set of hypothesized grammatical principles, i.e. hypotheses about language universals; good reasons for not relying parasitically on a particular type of syntactic argument (inevitably provisional and incomplete) in investigating linguistic change are given by Aitchison (1987: 13-16, 28-30). The following discussion is a sequel to one aspect of Russell (1986) in which the '*amba*-relative' was used as an example of the difficulties faced by nineteenth century codifiers of Swahili in the matter of choice of structures for inclusion in grammatical descriptions; I drew attention, in fn 9, to the increased syntactic flexibility afforded by the use of this pattern.

2. Modern (Standard) Swahili Relative Clause Structure

There are three morphological patterns for forming relative clause structure in Swahili:

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* A version of this paper was presented at Sociolinguistics Symposium 9, held 2-4 April 1992 at the University of Reading. I am most grateful to Tucker Childs, Casmir Rubagumya and Mark Sebba for their comments at that meeting on particular aspects of the paper.

York Papers in Linguistics 16 (1992) 121-138
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(1) ndizi zi - letwa - zo (Type 1)
bananas Pro - be brought - REL
the bananas which are (usually) brought

(2) ndizi zi - li - zo - letwa (Type 2)
bananas Pro - Past - REL - be brought
the bananas which were brought

(3) ndizi amba - zo zi - li - letwa (Type 3)
bananas - REL Pro - Past - be brought
the bananas which were brought

The order in which these patterns are listed conforms to the generally accepted view, among Bantuists, of their probable chronological appearance in Swahili; for a resumé of the arguments in support of this, see Schadeberg (1989: 33-35). It is important for what follows that note be taken of the more analytic nature of Type 3, which attaches the relative particle to *amba-*, instead of incorporating it into the verbal group either verb finally as in Type 1 (Post V) or following the tense-marker as in Type 2 (Post TM). The form *-zo-* is glossed as REL in the examples above because of its function as a relative pronoun in these clauses. The same form (and the parallel appropriate forms for the other noun classes) occurs in other environments but always with a substitutive anaphoric function. The form *-zo-* is bimorphemic, being derived from the pronomical concord *-zi-* (for Class 10 nouns) and the referential particle *-o-*.[1]

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[1] The form of this anaphoric particle varies with the class of the antecedent noun, e.g.
Class 2 pronominal concord *wa + o > o*
Class 5 pronominal concord *li + o > lo*
Class 7 pronominal concord *ki + o > cho* etc.

There are a number of linguistic constraints on the use of these relative clause structures. Type 2 is restricted to clauses tense-marked with *-li-* (Past), *-na-* (Present), *-taka-* (Future), and *-si-* (Negative), although in the early nineteenth century it could also occur with *-me-* (Perfect) - for example see the poem *Ayubu* in Allen (1971: 370-4). Type 3 is optional with these three tense-markers and obligatory with all other forms which can occupy the Tense 'slot' in the verbal group e.g. *-me-* (Perfect), *-ja-* (Neg. Perfect), *hu-* (Habitual), *-nge-/-ngali-* (Conditionals) etc., and with copular forms, e.g. *ni*, *ndi-* etc. Type 1 signals no time implication, and can be used for generic statements.

One function of *amba*-REL which contributes to the potential flexibility of written Swahili is to facilitate the relativization of NP's at the lower end of the 'accessibility hierarchy' (Keenan & Comrie 1977). For example, NP's denoting Instrument or Possessor are typically less accessible to relativization than are Subjects and Objects. Indeed speakers - and writers too - can avoid relativizing on these NP's (in languages which have the syntactic means to do so) by packaging a proposition in some other syntactic, or even lexical, way. It is not claimed that the following examples illustrate commonly-used sentence types; they are the result of elicitation from informants who have been asked to push the resources of the language to their limits, but they certainly occur (if infrequently) in written Swahili. In example (4) the Instrument noun is marked by *kwa*.[2]

Only in the restricted case of the locative predicators *-ko*, *-po*, *-mo*, prefixed by the pronominal concord does *-o* have a cataphoric function, e.g. *kiti kimo chumbani* - 'the chair is in the room.

[2] A (stylistically-motivated) alternative to *kwa* is to mark Instrument by means of the 'Prepositional' or 'Oblique' suffix on the verb, so *-kata -katia*. In this case Type 1 and Type 2 relative clauses are possible, e.g. *kisu nilichoikatia nyama*.

(4) Baba a - li - i - kata nyama kwa panga
Father Pro - Past - Obj - cut meat with machete
Father cut the meat with a machete

Panga is not relativizable via Type 1 or Type 2 relative clause structure, but it is possible using *amba*-REL even though some informants regard the resulting clause as of only marginal acceptability:

(5) panga amba - lo kwa - lo baba a - li - i - kata nyama
machete -REL with-Pro father he - Past - Obj - cut meat
(it)
the machete with which father cut the meat

Similarly, Possessor NP's:

(6) Juma a - li - m - chinja kuku ya wanawake
he - Past -Obj - kill chicken of women
Juma killed the women's chicken

Relativization is only achievable via *amba*-REL:

(7) wanawake amba - o Juma a - li - m - chinja kuku yao
women -REL he - Past -Obj - kill chicken their
the women whose chicken Juma killed

Notice that, in addition, the relativization requires genitive *ya* to be replaced by the possessive adjective *yao* ('the women who Juma killed their chicken').

Apart from the above linguistic environments which require *amba*-REL for the construction of relatives in modern standard Swahili, its use can be motivated, even in its optional environments, by a variety of discourse-based considerations. For example, *amba*-REL is the preferred relative structure for negating Past, Present and Future clauses if the

discourse requires tense to be given emphasis or if the context does not clearly indicate time reference. The negative form of Type 1, and of Type 2 for Past, Present and Future is:

(8) ndizi zi - si - zo - letwa
bananas Pro- Neg - REL - be brought

This structure contains no tense-marker, and in order to retain tense marking in the verbal group the use of *amba*-REL is necessary:

(9) ndizi amba - zo ha - zi - ku - letwa
bananas - REL Neg - Pro - Past - be brought
the bananas which were not brought

Here tense is unequivocally marked by *-ku-*, the negative form of the past tense marker.

Another example of a discourse motivation for *amba*-REL is the disambiguation of written clauses in which the antecedent noun is the Object of the relative clause verb and where both Subject and Object are members of the same noun class, i.e. the form of the relative particle is the same for both Subject and Object. When it is the object that is relativised, a 'Subject postposing' rule operates (Givon 1972). In example (10), if *mwivi* is the Object of the verb *-ona*, *mtoto* has to be in post-verb position; thus the surface structure is the same as for a clause with *mwivi* as Subject and *mtoto* as Object.

(10) mwivi a - li ye - mw - ona mtoto
thief s/he - Past - REL - Obj - see child
the thief who saw the child / the thief whom the child saw

The effect of postposing the Subject is to disallow the intervention of an NP between the relative pronoun and its antecedent. Example (11) shows how *amba*-REL allows the relative pronoun, attached to its

'carrier' *amba-*, to immediately follow - and clearly mark - its antecedent thus making Subject postposing unnecessary:

(11) mwivi amba-ye mtoto a -li- mw - ona
thief -REL child s/he - Past - Obj - see
the thief whom the child saw

3. The Evolution of Amba-REL

The archaic verb *-amba* ('say') is only evident in standard Swahili in the extended transitive form *-ambia* (tell). At some time in its history *-amba* became renalysed as a complementizer after verbs of saying and perception, and also developed into a carrier for bound pronouns with a relative clause marking function. It is the infinitive form of *-amba* which became reanalysed as a complementizer. The infinitive marker is *ku-*; *ku-amba* > *kwamba*. Example (12) shows its function:

(12) Wa - li - ona kwamba a - me - fariki
They - Past - realise that s/he - Perf - die
They realised that she had died

In spoken Swahili *kwamba* is very often omitted.

This is not by any means a rare type of syntactic reanalysis, as Lord (1976) points out. She cites a number of African and other languages, including creoles, which have a complementizer based on a reanalysed verb 'say'. Once *-amba* took on complementizer-like functions, it became defective as a verb, leaving only its 'prepositional' form *-ambia* as a new base stem (and a few greeting-formulas which contain it as a fossilized form).

Historically and synchronically more than one *amba*-REL structure has been attested. Examination of descriptions of varieties of Swahili from Krapf (1850) onwards (e.g. Weston 1903, Sacleux 1909, Lambert 1957 & 1958) indicates that at least two of the following four

structures have been found to be in variation in a given community at any one time in coastal/island Swahili.[3]

(13)	(a) Pro-amba-REL kwamba	e.g. zambazo kwamba
	(b) Pro-amba-REL	e.g. zambazo
	(c) amba-REL kwamba	e.g. ambazo kwamba
	(d) amba-REL	e.g. ambazo

The verbal nature of *amba-* is most clearly evident in structures (a) and (b), which are of the same morphological pattern as relative clause structure Type 1 shown in §2. Structures (a) - (d) are ordered according to the apparent direction of linguistic change, as far as this can be judged from earlier and more recent investigations. This trend towards morphological simplification, as *-amba* lost its 'verbiness', has culminated in (d) as the accepted form in the standard language, with (c) heard infrequently in some communities in the speech of those least influenced by the standard form.

One factor in the reanalysis of the verb *-amba* must have been the existence/adoption/extension of the verb *-sema* 'say', 'speak'. In the long poem (Utendi) *Ayubu* (see Allen 1971: 370-427), written well before 1835,[4] *-sema* occurs in variation with *-amba*, and there are occurrences of *amba*-REL patterns (c) and (d). That patterns (c) and (d) were well-established in northern (Lamu and Pate) Swahili by the beginning of the nineteenth century is evidenced by the occurrence in the poem *Inkishafi*, probably composed between 1810 and 1820, of a place

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3 In tape-recordings of casual speech from thirty-six Mombasa informants, ranging in age from 11 to 70+, made during 1973, there were only two examples of a complementizer following *amba*-REL, i.e. *amba*-REL *kwamba* and *amba*-REL *kuwa*. Both examples occurred in the speech of people over 50 years of age. (See Russell 1981: 172-5).

4 Allen (1971: 370) points out that the earliest known manuscript of *Ayubu*, dated as 1835, was almost certainly not the original and that the poem is likely to have been composed much earlier than that date.

adverbial between *amba*-REL and the verb of the relative clause (Harries 1962: 90):

(14) amba-yo moyo - ni ni - kusudie
-REL heart - Loc I - intend (subjunct)
which I intend in my heart

This is the structure that is shown in Fig. 1 below as:
amba-REL [Place Adv.] V

As for ***kwamba*** in its complementizer function, this was well-established by the time Muyaka of Mombasa began composition around 1810 (see the collection of his poems edited by Abdulaziz 1979), although there is at least one example of it in his work co-occurring with ***kuwa*** ('to be'), the other complementizer with which it is in variation in modern Swahili - see the poem ***Kitambi Changu*** on p. 174 of Abdulaziz. One of the problems of attempting to trace the development of particular Swahili structures is that the main body of written data from before the late nineteenth century, apart from Europeans' grammatical descriptions and vocabulary lists, is eighteenth and nineteenth century poetry transliterated from the Arabic script. The rigid syllabic measure and rhyming conventions to which these poems had to conform very often affected the morphological structure, e.g. omission of pronominal concord, and insertion of consonants (Harries 1962: 21-22). Another complicating factor is that linguistic forms associated with the Northern end of the Swahili coast became accepted as part of the literary medium for poets further South. As Harries points out, the grammar of contemporary spoken Swahili cannot safely be deduced for a particular area from the poetry composed - or copied for further circulation - in that area. However, it seems reasonable to argue that if a particular functional morphosyntactic element such as *amba*-REL occurs, even if REL varied in form with respect to antecedent nouns of the same class, at least some people in the milieu in which

the poem was heard or read would have been familiar with it - whether they regarded it as archaic, part of normal usage or innovatory.

One reason why the history of *amba*-REL is of interest is that it was a latecomer to the codification process which culminated in Steere's (1870) grammar of Swahili being accepted, in a later edition, as the basis of the standard language in 1925 (see Russell 1986). In his description, Steere mentioned the existence of *amba*-REL but asserted that it was not in use in Zanzibar at that time; this statement stayed in subsequent editions of the grammar until 1943. The 1903 description of the language by Weston, written for his students (of various provenances including the mainland) at the Zanzibar theological college, referred to *amba*-REL as being a feature of casual speech in Zanzibar and only used for relativizing nouns denoting humans. These references suggest that, at the turn of the century, *amba*-REL was a relatively recent innovation in Zanzibar Town speech. Weston, like Velten (1898), refers to the form as archaic, and demonstrates its use by presenting a paradigm of structure (b) in Giriama, one of the Mijikenda tongues, spoken by communities along the savannah hinterland behind the coast of Kenya and northern Tanzania. Krapf (1850) had also noted *amba*-REL, with structures (a) and (c), for 'Nyika', as well as for Swahili. His 'Nyika' was one of the Mijikenda varieties, either of Rabai, where he initially worked, or from his Digo informant. Both Swahili and Mijikenda are members of a North East Bantu linguistic grouping. It is worth noting, at this point, the close and long-standing contact between the Mijikenda people and the Swahili-speaking people of the coastal towns.

The Mijikenda have for centuries been allies of the Swahili 'Twelve Tribes' of Mombasa, assisting them to expel the Portuguese from their island territory in 1728, and in wars against Pate and Oman in the early years of the nineteenth century (Abdulaziz 1979). In addition to contact through mutual support and the provision of material aid in time of war, there was also contact through trade. It was through Mijikenda territory and by the agency of their middlemen that trade, e.g. in ivory,

between Mombasa merchants and the interior was carried on. Also the Mijikenda provided a nearby market for goods imported through the port of Mombasa, from the Arabian peninsula and elsewhere. Large numbers of Mijikenda were to be seen in Mombasa during the two seasons of the year when trading with the outside world was possible. Parkin (1985: 247) notes that key cosmological ideas are held in common by Mijikenda and Swahili communities and that their apparently dissimilar marriage systems are interpretable as variations on a basic pattern. He also points out the traditional infiltration by the Mijikenda of Swahili society by means of intermarriage and/or conversion to Islam.

Close cultural and linguistic contact of the above kind would help to maintain the use of shared functional morphosyntactic elements, such as *amba*-REL, and goes some way towards explaining its presence as far South as Mombasa in the mid-nineteenth century. Its innovation in cosmopolitan Zanzibar Town towards the end of the century, in casual speech, can be attributed not only to visitors from Mombasa and further North, but also to well-travelled Zanzibaris such as L'Ajjemy (1907). Another possible factor might have been Mijikenda influence; Jay Kitsao (p.c.) has pointed out, from oral evidence, the presence of a Giriama community in Zanzibar Town at the end of the nineteenth century.

4. The Use of Amba-Rel

In Fig. 1 (over) the number and nature of *amba*-REL examples is shown for some representative texts for different periods during the last two centuries. The texts are illustrative of the development in the use made of *amba*-REL in written Swahili. Note that in Fig. 1 the provenance of text sources shows two areas where this information is considered relevant, e.g. Tippu Tip is shown as 'South & Zanzibar' because, although much of his life was spent travelling extensively inland in what is now Tanzania, he also lived in Zanzibar from time to time.

Under 'Structural Characteristics' the types of *amba*-REL structure are shown, together with the number of occurrences in the text;

occurrences of structures with inserted elements between the relative pronoun and the verb are also noted, e.g. '-REL [Place Adv.] V' means that an adverbial of place occurs between *amba*-REL and the verb. Also noted in this column are the types of phrase structure that occur, e.g. SO means that the relativized noun is the Subject of the matrix sentence and the relative pronoun functions as the Object of the verb of the embedded relative clause; OS refers to the relativized noun being the Object in the matrix sentence, with the relative pronoun functioning as the Subject of the relative clause, and so on. Romaine (1982: 99-104) summarizes an argument, based on various sources, that there is a hierarchy of perceptual/developmental complexity such that OS relatives are more easily acquired and decoded than SS types, along an OS > SS > OO > SO hierarchy. Evidence from the study of pidgin speakers has apparently been used to suggest that it is somehow 'easier' to relativize Objects of sentences rather than Subjects because it only entails paratactic conjoining of clauses rather than embedding one in the other. This suggestion calls into question the relative ordering of SS and OO on the posited implicational hierarchy. The case for such a hierarchy is not sufficiently strong to permit claims based on it to be made about *amba*-REL in Swahili texts. A more useful approach to the question of the constituent structure in which *amba*-REL occurs, particularly when dealing with written data, is to take account of Romaine's (1982: 104) suggestion that it is the requirements of discourse which are likely to motivate the choice of structure. She points out that nouns encoding new information are highly likely to be in Object position in the sentence. The occurrence of relativization of nouns denoting Time, Possessor and Place is also shown.

It should be noted that in each of the three corpora of poetry *-amba* occurs as a verb, as well as in its re-analysed guise of relative pronoun carrier; it is not possible to say when its verbal function finally became obsolete in all Swahili-speaking communities. It does not occur as a verb in any of the selected prose texts.

Fig. 1 Amba-REL in Texts

Text	Provenance & Date	Structural Characteristics
Pre-1840 poetry		
(i) Inkishafi (approx 1300 words) *-amba* occurs as verb	North 1810-20	amba-REL kwamba (l) SO amba-REL (l) OO -REL [Place Adv.] V
(ii) Ayubu (approx 5000 words) *-amba* occurs as verb	North 1835 or earlier	amba-REL kwamba (l) amba-REL (12) OS, OO, Time NP
(iii) Muyaka's poetry (133 poems) *-amba* occurs as verb	Mombasa 1810-1840	amba-REL kwamba (l) amba-REL (12) OS, OO, Time NP
Prose		
(i) Tippu Tip - dictated autobiography	South & Zanzibar 1902	
(ii) A Sapuli - L2 (21 personal letters)	South 1898-1912	
(iii) Folktales collected by Carl Velten	South 1903	Pro-amba-REL (l) amba-REL (6) all OS

Text	Provenance & Date	Structural Characteristics
(iv) L'Ajjemy's history of the Wakilindi	Zanzibar & South 1907	amba-REL (4) OS, OO
(v) Shaaban Robert - autobiography (5000 word corpus extracted)	South 1949	amba-REL (19) OS, SS(I), OO, Possessor NP, -REL [Time Adv] V (2) -REL [Place Adv.] V (2) 6 of the 19 have a non-restrictive function (not indicated by punctuation)
(vi) M S Mohamed - novel (5000 word corpus extracted)	Zanzibar 1976	amba-REL (24) OS, SS, OO, SO, Possessor NP, Locative NP -REL [Time Adv] V (3) -REL [clause] V (I) 16 of the 24 have a non-restrictive function - all indicated by punctuation

(i) In Harries (1962: 90-102)
(ii) In Allen (1971: 370-427)
(iii) In Abdulaziz (1979)

Neither of the first two prose texts contains an example of *amba*-REL. Tippu Tip's autobiography was dictated to the German linguist, Brode, and published in the *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*. The fact that it was dictated no doubt accounts for the somewhat 'staccato' style, characterized by relatively simple sentence structure with juxtaposed or conjoined, rather than embedded, clauses.

There are, however, plentiful examples of relative clauses of Types 1 and 2, particularly time clauses. It is not absolutely certain that Swahili was Tippu Tip's first language although this seems likely; he would almost certainly have sometimes needed to use Arabic as a primary working language, and also Nyamwezi with some of his relatives, particularly the women. The letters written by Agnes Sapuli in Southern Tanzania contain no examples of *amba*-REL either. She was a Yao speaker who learned Swahili as a second language at a UMCA mission school where she was taught by teachers who had themselves been taught by Steere and his contemporaries. There is ample evidence that Steere's 1870 grammar was the model for Swahili teaching and for the language of the school textbooks in all the UMCA schools in the two mainland areas where they established mission-stations; as we have seen, *amba*-REL was not part of the codified model.

The folk-tales (iii) collected by Velten from informants on the Tanzanian coast have a very small number of occurrences, and it is notable that they are all of the OS type. Although Velten referred to this structure as 'veraltete', it may well have been an innovation for his speakers, it is the themes of folktales that remain unchanged, not the morphosyntax. Prose text (iv) is from L'Ajjemy, a Zanzibari, who travelled to and from the Tanzanian mainland in the course of his work. The small number of occurrences, all of which relativize Object nouns, supports the innovation theory.

With Shaaban Robert, Swahili's first novelist, we come to a major factor in the part played by *amba*-REL in the syntactic elaboration of written Swahili - writers bilingual in Swahili and English, with English as the medium of their secondary education and beyond. I have deliberately chosen Robert's first extended piece of writing rather than one of the later novels, to show the extent of the syntactic complexity in which *amba*-REL was involved from the outset in his work, which became highly influential through its inclusion in school syllabuses. By 1949 when this text was published, occasional examples of *amba*-REL were beginning to appear in newspapers, biblical translations and

textbooks. In Robert's work we find *amba*-REL being used to mark non-restrictive relative clauses, interpretable as such from the context and, e.g. the antecedent being a proper noun. This trend, of *amba*-REL becoming associated with non-restrictive clauses, is taken much further in the text from Mohamed's work; in his case they are clearly marked off, as in English, by commas. Notice the relativization of NP's lower down the 'accessibility hierarchy' (see §2 above) in the texts from Robert and Mohamed. (That *amba*-REL clauses of time occur in the early poetry is evidence of the structure's long-established presence in Northern Swahili). In Mohamed's text we also notice the full range of types of phrase structure in which *amba*-REL occurs. Finally, in addition to the various types of non-clause adverbial structure inserted between *amba*-REL and the verb of the relative clause, we note, in the Mohamed text, a full clause in this position. This is very much a feature of relatively recent Swahili and is particularly common in journalistic material.

Journalists, like other professional communicators, receive their secondary and higher education through English and are inevitably influenced by English written styles. In addition they are frequently required to render international newsagency copy into Swahili, and this tends to result in extensive calquing. The following examples demonstrate the kind of effect brought about by this situation. Relative clauses are underlined; elements inserted between *amba*-REL and the verbs are in square brackets.

(15) Rais Barre ambaye [kwa mara mbili mfululizo] alitaka kusimamishwa kwa mapigano tangu kuzuka kwa ugomvi huo, alisema Ijumaa kuwa alikuwa tayari kujiuzulu. (Uhuru 8.1.91)

'President Barre who [on two successive occasions] has been on the point of being forcibly ousted since the outbreak of this fighting, said on Friday that he was ready to resign.'

(16) Ndugu Walele alisema kuwa maofisa wa polisi walikwenda kwa helikopta kwenye sehemu ambayo [inadhaniwa] jahazi hilo lilizama ili kuangalia hali ilivyo. (Uhuru 17.8.83)

'Comrade Walele said that the police officers went by helicopter to the area in which [it is thought] the dhow sank in order to assess the situation.'

(17) nchi yake pia inapendelea kuwepo utaratibu wa kubadilishana bidhaa ambao [alielezal utakuwa na manufaa zaidi kwa Tanzania kutokana na kukabiliwa na hali ya fedha za kigeni (17.8.83)

'his country also desires the establishment of a trade agreement which [he explained] will be of increasing benefit to Tanzania in facing its difficult foreign currency situation.'

The syntactic flexibility afforded by the use of *amba*-REL is shown in example (15) where a leftward movement rule (not possible with relative clause Types 1 and 2) enables one adverbial structure to precede the verb and the other to follow it. Examples (16) and (17) show the direct influence of English journalistic style, with the use of the 'higher level' clauses *inadhaniwa* ('it is thought') in (16) and *alieleza* in (17) immediately following the relative pronoun.

The importance of *amba*-REL for the development of written Swahili, and the increasing divergence of the spoken and written language, is that it provided a linguistic context for one area of the grammar to become more analytic. It is through the agency of writers bilingual in Swahili and English that this analytic context has been exploited to the full and brought about syntactic convergence at a surface level in certain written styles.

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